

Project Read, Reading with Angels

A Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort Community Project

2012 Service Learning Experience

Expected Outcomes

- Work with the same student every tutoring session
- Assist with homework
- Work with a variety of subjects
- Learn how to handle patience with the students

Abstract

The Building Communities through Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort (BCSJLLC) strives to help students understand the importance of social justice and its impact on communities while providing students with opportunities to grow as leaders. The cohort integrates classroom education with service learning opportunities. This fall we participated in the first annual Book Buddy Program with the Cleveland Elementary School. Each member of the LLC donated a new book for a student in grades 4,5, and special education. All BCSJLLC members were trained by its community partner Project READ to tutor students in K-8 and young adults. Project READ then placed us in tutoring positions at Holy Angels, an elementary school. Holy Angels is a Catholic elementary school whose mission is to improve the faith of their students while also excelling in educational development. We worked one-on-one or with a small group of students in grade kindergarten through third grade with math facts, recognizing and writing the alphabet, flash cards, Dolch words, vocabulary/spelling words, writing complete sentences, and learning how to use money. The students of Holy Angels helped us to improve our communication skills and widen our thought process by giving us the opportunity to apply the Marianist ideals of lead, learn, and serve.

Building Communities for Social Justice LLC Mission Statement

We are a living learning community that:

- engages in a process of intellectual inquiry
- productively negotiates and creates space for critical listening and the free exchange of ideas
- holistically integrates academic, residential, and co-curricular experiences
- deploys the particular methodologies of the Humanities disciplines, specifically those associated with the study of English, Philosophy, and Religion
- fosters an interdisciplinary approach to fundamental human concerns, e.g., what it means to be human
- focuses on apprehending and addressing issues of Social Justice, such as stewardship, solidarity with those different from us, commitment to the integrity and quality of all human life, and dedication to the common good
- encourages undergraduate research that is informed by the experience of service learning

Holy Angels Mission Statement

We are a vibrant education ministry of the Parish committed to challenging our students to grow in faith and excel in academics within a caring Christian environment.



The main entrance of Holy Angels Elementary School



Student during the after school program



Student shares a high-five with his tutor



Students and tutor learning together.



Student and tutor working together in a problem



Student shares a high-five with his tutor

The Cave

Plato wrote the *Republic* around 380 BC. He was the most prominent philosopher and teacher of this time, and a student of Socrates. His main work, *The Republic*, included the Allegory of the Cave in one of its parts. The Allegory begins with people who have been chained up to a wall in a cave their entire lives. All they can see is the wall in front of them. There is a fire behind them and people are carrying different objects in front of the fire, projecting shadows on the wall in front of the people chained up. Eventually one person is unchained. That person is allowed to move out of the cave and is able to view the objects that were casting the shadows. He makes his way up to the world above and is able to see everything in the light of the sun. After he has "moved up" and able to view the world for what it actually is, not their shadows, it is then his duty to go back down into the cave in order to help unchain the others. He is required to help them toward enlightenment and to show them the truth that he has seen and now understands.

Through our service we enacted the main ideas of this allegory. We played the role of the man who is unchained and allowed out of the cave to become enlightened. Since we have gone through the process of middle school, high school, and now college, we are more "enlightened" than students at the grade level of Holy Angels School. According to Plato it is our duty to "enlighten" others. We shared our experiences so that these students will have a clearer understanding of the world around them.

John Rawls

John Rawls was a philosopher who studied social justice during the twentieth century. Rawls achieved leadership through his presidency in the American Association of Political and Legal Philosophers. He was also a part of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association. His book titled *Theory of Justice*, published in 1971, presents a solution to the problem of distributive justice through his theory known as "Justice with Fairness". Rawls focuses specifically on the importance of the primary goods which are divided into natural (imagination, intelligence, health, etc.) and social (civil rights, political rights, wealth, etc.)

Rawls' theory is composed of the veil of ignorance which is the idea that people in charge of making decisions within a society are "blinded". In other words, they do not know their place in society, skills, fortune, ethnicity or social status. As a consequence, they think as if they are among those in the bottom of the society which leads to an egalitarian way of thinking. The veil of ignorance is also accompanied with the difference principle. This allows inequalities in the distribution of goods within a society only if they benefit the members who are most disadvantaged. Rawls theory is based on a social contract which was introduced thousands of years before him. Rousseau wrote about the idea of social contracts in the 18th century. However, other philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke wrote about them in the 17th century. Rawls' social contract places the members of a society in the original position, which is a neutral point of view that is to be adopted in our way of thinking about justice which leads to equality. The impartiality is ensured by the veil of ignorance. For our service learning, we worked one-on-one with students. This work mirrors Rawls' Theory because he believed that justice and change can only begin at the individual level.

Reflection

Before beginning this tutoring experience, I expected to do a lot of reading with the students in small groups. Instead, I worked mostly one-on-one with different students of all ages to help complete their homework and answer questions. We worked specifically with counting money, measuring objects with rulers, and completing worksheets and packets for their English and math classes. Helping the students comprehend these topics challenged me to think in different ways in order to aid them in understanding what they were learning. This Experience taught me the importance of patience and understanding while assisting students with their work.
-Lindsay Smore

In the twelve hours that I spent with the students that I tutored, they in return helped me and I learned a lot from them. Through this experience I have learned about patience, compassion and each child's individual needs. In the beginning I expected that I would be working with students who needed help in remedial work such as spelling and writing. I soon came to realize that many were above the average level of students in their grade. Tarina, a student I worked with, was only in kindergarten but already knew how to write in cursive and spell words such as "would" that a fellow classmate was having a problem spelling. Working with the children helped me to realize how important it is to assist the people who matter the most, the youth.
-Sadari Phillips

Before my first visit to Holy Angels, I assumed I would be assigned a student and tutor him throughout the entire project. On the contrary, we were put with different students every time. We did not stay on the same place every day. We spent our days in the library, in the gym, in the main lobby, etc. I thought I was going to be standing for the entire hour teaching a kid. I also realized how kids open themselves up so pretty easily. I thought it was to go to be really calm, but some of the students were really restless and made us be really patient with them. The reason it is important to assist the youth is because without them their would not be a future. While we are helping them we are making the future better.
-Jose Panameno

I originally went into tutoring at Holy Angels elementary school thinking that I would be assigned a student who I would help every time I came to tutor. However what actually happened was that I was put into a room with everyone else tutoring and just helped any student until they did not need help anymore. Therefore the amount of students I tutored or helped a day varied but it was definitely not the same one student every time. I liked doing it this way more than having just one student because this way I was able to help numerous students in a day. By doing this it made what I did that much more substantial. It was substantial because by helping many different students the satisfaction from helping just one student learn is multiplied.
-Will Vanderslice